



NEWS RELEASE

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Memorial Day weekend safety

Corps emphasizes water safety at federal recreation areas during holiday weekend, through summer months

CONCORD, Mass. – With warmer weather approaching more people will be recreating near or in the water this upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend and through the summer months. Now is the time to start thinking about water safety. Each year, approximately 6,000 people drown in the United States. In fact, drowning is a leading cause of accidental death for children. Yet, it is possible – just by wearing a life jacket or taking other precautions – to reduce drowning deaths.

The major cause of boating-related fatalities, 70 percent according to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, involve boat operators who had not received any boating safety instruction. In 2008, of the 709 recreational boating fatalities, over 89 percent of those victims were not wearing life jackets.

National Safe Boating Week is May 22-28, 2010. Water safety officials urge everyone to learn more about safe boating practices and always engage in proper and responsible conduct while on the water. America's rivers, lakes and oceans are wonderful places for boaters to gather with family and friends while enjoying the outdoors. As they do so, it is important that individuals avoid risky behavior that can lead to boating accidents. Factors such as careless and reckless operation, inattention and excessive speed contribute to accidents. To help ensure that individuals stay safe on America's waterways, the U. S. Coast Guard urges citizens to take basic safety precautions such as wearing a life jacket, participating in a boat safety course, getting a free vessel check, and never boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs. By practicing responsible boating habits, citizens can help contribute to a safer, more enjoyable experience on the water.

Here are some safety tips from the Corps of Engineers to help recreation seekers stay safe in the water at federal recreation areas over the Memorial Day holiday weekend and through the summer months.

Watch your children

It only takes a child an average of 20 seconds to drown, according to water safety officials. Watch your children at all times when around the water. Don't let them wander very far from the adults and never let them go into the water unless you know it.

Alcohol and water activities don't mix

Approximately one-third of all boating accidents and fatalities involve alcohol. Just one beer can impair balance, vision, judgment and reaction time. Research shows that four hours of boating – exposure to noise, vibration, sun, glare and wind – produces fatigue that simulates drunkenness. Boating fatigue combined with alcohol consumption intensifies the effects of both and increases accident risks.

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Water safety at Corps recreation areas/2-2-2-2-2

Boaters should know the rules

Boaters should take appropriate safety classes, be familiar with governing state laws and have proper safety equipment onboard. Many states require boater education or boat operator licenses. As an added incentive, most insurance companies offer discounts to boaters who have successfully completed a boating safety course.

While boating make sure you wear a life jacket. Don't just carry one on board. Make sure it is U.S. Coast Guard- approved and appropriately sized. Most states require children under the age of 13 to wear life jackets. Know your state law!

Don't overload the boat (consider boat size, number of passengers and extra equipment before loading). Check your boat for all required safety equipment. Carry a set of navigational charts. Check the weather forecast. File a boat plan with family or friends who are not on the vessel so in case something does happen or you are late returning someone will know your approximate whereabouts.

Learn to swim

Surprisingly, two-thirds of those who drown never had the intention of being in the water. Never dive head first into lakes and rivers – the results can be tragic. Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat.

Don't take chances by over-estimating your swimming skills. Reach or throw a floatation device to help someone in trouble. Don't go in the water! Swim only in designated swimming areas. Use the buddy system and never swim alone. Half of all drowning victims are alone when they drown. Take swimming lessons and learn to swim.

Water safety must be a top priority for everyone using the nation's waterways and lakes this holiday weekend and through the summer. An estimated 360 million people visit U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation areas nationwide annually. Make your visit to any recreation area a safe and enjoyable one. Taking water safety precautions saves lives – maybe even your own.

Federal recreation areas in New England

There are numerous opportunities to enjoy recreation at federal reservoirs and at the Cape Cod Canal in New England this Memorial Day weekend and through the summer months. Most areas feature small lakes with facilities designed for day use such as picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing and hunting. There are also a few facilities for overnight camping. Most Corps-managed recreation areas are open from Memorial Day weekend through the middle of September. There are beaches and boat ramps available at reservoirs and lakes in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Vermont. For more information go to the Corps' New England District web site at <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil> and select "recreation" and then select your state and nearest location on the map.

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